

UNCLAS MADRID 003022

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SUBJECT: CUBAN VALIDATION STUDY RESULTS FROM MADRID

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Embassy Madrid wanted to examine overstay rates of applicants issued visas for tourist travel to the United States. Because of the wealth of information available on Cuban applicants, the Cuban community's travel patterns were studied. Post initiated a validation study to determine the reliability of adjudication decisions for Cuban tourist visas. Eighty-seven Cubans who were interviewed between December 2002 and May 2003 were contacted to see if they had returned from their trip or if they had overstayed in the United States. Fifty-eight of the Cubans contacted returned from their trips without incident. When confirmed overstayers are added to likely overstayers, there was an overstay rate of 26.4 percent of all applicants in the study. There is no exact profile of a typical overstayer, as ages ranged from 6 to 86, and came from all regions in Spain. Results were both surprising and discouraging. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Embassy Madrid was interested in finding out overstay rates of different nationalities that were granted tourist visas. Because of the wealth of information available on Cuban applicants due to increased security procedures, the Cuban community in Spain was selected for study. All Cuban visa applicants interviewed between December 1, 2002, and May 31, 2003, were included in the study. Phone interviews with the applicants were conducted in February 2004, giving all visa recipients sufficient time to visit the United States and return to Spain. (Cuban tourist visas are generally one-entry visas over a six-month period.)

¶3. (U) Embassy Madrid's study was a validation study of visa issuances, but it was not set-up in the traditional sense of a non-immigrant visa (NIV) validation study. For this study, Embassy Madrid validated only Cuban visa applicants that had received tourist visas. Applicants that were refused tourist visas in the initial interviews were not considered in the study. For this period post adjudicated 215 Cuban visa cases and had a forty-seven percent refusal rate for Cubans.

¶4. (U) All eighty-seven Cubans who interviewed for tourist visas between December 2002 and May 2003 were included in the study. Study interviewers used telephone numbers supplied by the applicants. Spanish home numbers were phoned first. If a Spanish home number was unreachable, the interviewer then dialed mobile telephone numbers, work telephone numbers, and directory assistance. If an applicant was unreachable after several attempts, U.S. information provided on application forms was used to contact friends and relatives of the applicant who live in the U.S. Sixty-nine of the Cuban applicants were reached. Eleven of the sixty-nine Cubans reached had confirmed overstays. Fifty-eight of the Cubans completed their travel without incident. Eighteen of the applicants were unreachable. Many of the unreachable applicants provided work phone numbers that were either non-existent, or numbers where current employers and workers had never heard of the applicant. Others provided point-of-contact information in the U.S. or phone numbers that did not exist. Phone numbers can change over time, and phones frequently get disconnected, but post believes that at a minimum, twelve of these eighteen applicants provided inaccurate information and are probable overstays. When these twelve cases are added to the eleven confirmed overstays, this makes an estimated overstay rate of 26.4 percent. This estimated overstay rate is only for people granted tourist visas.

¶5. (U) It is difficult to determine an exact profile of the typical Cuban applicant who overstays their visa. Fifty-five percent of overstay applicants were married, while forty-five percent were single. Ages varied from 6 to 86. Some of the applicants who overstayed neglected to mention detailed travel plans, but others included very detailed plans. Overstayers and likely overstayers came from all regions of Spain with slightly more representation in Madrid, Barcelona, and the Canary Islands, areas of large Cuban populations.

¶6. (U) Results were both surprising and discouraging, considering Embassy Madrid already refused a high number of Cubans during the time period used in this study. Adjudicating officers have found the study useful, and post has already incorporated the study's findings into the interviewing of Cuban nationals.

MANZANARES